

A bold year for beverages

By [Alex Glenday](#)

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Under the pandemic prohibition, ever-resourceful South Africans found unconventional and innovative ways to quench their thirst. From fermenting pineapples for a home brew, to whipping up non-alcoholic versions of their favourite cocktails, consumers have opened themselves up to new and refreshing taste experiences in a wonderful way.



Alex Glenday, Brew Kombucha

As a result, 2021 is set to be an interesting time for beverages and beverage-industry practices, which previously were not considered mainstream.

Things are looking different for the future of the beverage industry. We are being pushed towards a new normal that emphasises sustainability, ethical practices, transparency and accountability.

Ensuring these values are built into a beverage brand benefits both producers, who get the satisfaction of knowing their brand is having a positive impact, and consumers, who can rest assured that what they're consuming is healthy all-round.

Rather than fleeting trends, there are signs of new consumer behaviour. Accelerated by the impact of the Covid-19, this mindset shift is going to have long-term effect on consumer expectations, and the beverage industry will have to respond accordingly. Here's how:

Local is *lekker*

The lockdown saw a huge boost in support for smaller, local South African businesses as people searched for ways to support their community during a difficult time. The exposure to small businesses demonstrated all the benefits of shopping local – from better customer support, to more personalised engagements.

In general, local businesses are better able to foster a direct connection with consumers, either face to face or via social media, and many have been able to create a significant brand-loyal customer base during this time. In a digital age where people are always searching for personalisation and meaningful interactions, this trend is set to grow steadily as we head into 2021.



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Health first

Over the past few years, the general trajectory in food and beverages has been towards low-sugar, nutrient-rich products. Living through a global pandemic has compounded this trend and made consumers think far more carefully about the impact of their eating and drinking habits.

Drinks with inherent healthy properties, like vitamin-infused juices and probiotic-rich fermented teas, are primed to become even more popular as people search for ways to protect their immune systems from the inside out. Additionally, thanks to exposure to non-alcoholic drinks during lockdown, we're likely to see the beginnings of a wider interest in these alternatives, now that people have tasted and enjoyed them.

Sustainable, from start to finish

If the pandemic is anything to go by, our Earth is in trouble. Now, more than ever, this fact has been highlighted to consumers. In particular, younger generations – for whom global warming is a primary concern – are willing to change their buying habits, if it has a positive effect on the Earth.

Not only do they want to know where their food and drinks comes from, they also want to know about the impact their production and disposal has on the environment. Moving forward, organically-sourced ingredients and recyclable packaging will drive purchasing decisions.



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Direct-to-consumer

Many companies were unable to sell their goods through traditional wholesale and retail partners under lockdown, which resulted in a boom of direct-to-customer online stores. Now that people have enjoyed the convenience of having their drinks delivered right to their doorstep, and with social distancing measures likely to still be in effect for a long time, customers will come to expect this as a standard offering – especially from smaller businesses.

The benefit for beverage producers is that this gives them the opportunity to control the brand experience, build direct

customer relationships and increase brand loyalty, even as the market struggles to recover.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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